

changed is that the need, if anything, is greater and the path forward is even easier.

I just completed a press conference with my good friend TOM PETRI and with President Ronald Reagan. President Reagan, in 1982, in his Thanksgiving Day radio address, explained why we needed to raise the gas tax.

He said: "One of our greatest material blessings is the outstanding network of roads and highways that spreads across this great continent. Freedom of travel and the romance of the road are vital parts of our heritage, and they help make America great.

"We simply cannot allow this magnificent system to deteriorate beyond repair. The time has come to preserve what Americans spent so much time and effort to create, and that means a nationwide conservation effort in the best sense of the word.

"So I am asking Congress when it reconvenes next week to approve a new highway program that will enable us to complete construction of the interstate system and at the same time get on with the job of renovating existing highways. The program will not increase the Federal deficit or add to the taxes that you and I pay on April 15. It will be paid for by those of us who use the system, and it will cost the average car owner only about \$30 a year. That is less than the cost of a couple of shock absorbers.

"So what we are proposing is to add the equivalent of 5 cents a gallon to the existing highway user fee, the gas tax, which hasn't been increased in the last 23 years. The cost to the average motorist will be small, but the benefit to our transportation system will be immense. The program will stimulate 170,000 jobs, not make-work projects, but in real, worthwhile work in hard-hit construction industries, and an additional 150,000 jobs in related industries.

"Perhaps most important, we will be preserving for future generations of Americans a highway system that has long been the envy of the world and has truly made the average American driver king of the road.

"Thanks for listening, and until next time, God bless you."

That is a speech that could be given by any of us or by President Obama—and should be. Congress did return after that holiday, and President Reagan and Tip O'Neill more than doubled the gas tax. What has not changed is that we haven't raised the gas tax in 22 years. It costs the average family \$377 per year in damage to their cars.

If we increase the gas tax according to my proposal, H.R. 3636, it won't create 300,000 jobs; it will create 1.5 million family-wage jobs across the country.

Mr. Speaker, I understand people don't like the gas tax. I don't like the gas tax. I want to raise it, index it, and then abolish it and replace it with something that is sustainable. But in the meantime, raising the gas tax is

the only viable approach, as verified by two Presidential commissions that reported to President Bush.

We have been asleep at the switch. It is time for us to step up. At a time of dramatically falling gas prices—23 cents on average in the last month, and they are projected to continue going down—now is the perfect time to step up, to raise the gas tax slowly over the next 3 years, rebuild and renew America, put family-wage jobs across the spectrum, and make our communities more livable, our families safer, healthier, and more economically secure.

All it takes is a little leadership and courage. Like Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill did 32 years ago, I think we can do that now, and we should.

RANGER CHAPLAIN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. POE of Texas). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on something very dear to my heart. The duty of a military chaplain is to help guide the hearts and minds of the soldiers that he serves with or she serves with, and that comes from a perspective of a background of their own faith, but also the respect of the faiths of others that they serve with, making sure that all feel a responsibility to not only do their job, their mission, but also to themselves, that they are being all that they can be in their own careers, in their own missions.

But just again, here we go again, as the old saying goes. Recently, in my district, an Army chaplain gave a suicide awareness and prevention brief as required by the Army and received a letter of concern in his official record. A letter of concern is a means to admonish a soldier's actions.

The chaplain did not infringe upon anyone's rights, did not receive any complaints from anyone being briefed that day; but after the chaplain's actions were reviewed, he was considered to have not violated any Army regulation or policy, yet his negative counseling remains, simply because at a time in which our society is dealing with soldiers and airmen who are struggling with depression and struggling with suicide rates, he had the audacity to share his own experience with depression and how his faith helped him.

What is a chaplain supposed to do except to share from his own heart in a way that is encouraging to others whether they have faith or no faith? I hope—no, I pray—this counseling record will reflect soon his innocence.

The Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers decided to characterize the chaplain's briefing as evangelism in mental health training. The MAAF goes on to say that receiving Christian doctrine as a way to combat depression and suicidal thoughts would increase

the amount of suicides in the military. This statement belittles the belief of soldiers who feel their faith may help them through difficult and troubling times.

Apparently, the MAAF feel only their systems of beliefs are worth propagating and any others are irrelevant, if not damaging, to a soldier's emotional health.

As a military chaplain, all I have to say to the MAAF is that if it protects and helps someone value life, keep their own life, then what they need to do is be reminded that they have an opinion, and so does everyone else.

It is time that they lived up to their own thoughts, that thoughts matter, and that what this chaplain did should be reversed. It should not reflect on his record. When you have someone actually in the game trying to help, it is not the time for little people on the outside to criticize. They need to get a new direction and a new focus, and this chaplain needs to be restored and this letter removed.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed without amendment a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 4924. An act to direct the Secretary of the Interior to enter into the Big Sandy River-Planet Ranch Water Rights Settlement Agreement and the Hualapai Tribe Bill Williams River Water Rights Settlement Agreement, to provide for the lease of certain land located within Planet Ranch on the Bill Williams River in the State of Arizona to benefit the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program, and to provide for the settlement of specific water rights claims in the Bill Williams River watershed in the State of Arizona.

The message also announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 2917. An act to expand the program of priority review to encourage treatments for tropical diseases.

SUPPORTING THE ABLE ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. CRAMER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CRAMER. Mr. Speaker, my intention this morning was to get up and try to be eloquent when talking about the ABLE Act, Achieving a Better Life Experience, which we will vote on later today, but since yesterday, I have received four emails from parents in North Dakota whose words are far more eloquent than mine could ever be.

I will submit all of their words into the RECORD, but I want to share a few of the highlights from these important emails from my constituents.

Roxane Romanick writes:

How exciting that we are at this point where the dreams of the act passing may come true in the next days.